

# Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*... examination of the context, causes, sequence and consequence of the events of November 3, 1979*





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# GREENSBORO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION REPORT

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*Presented to the residents of Greensboro,  
the City, the Greensboro Truth and Community  
Reconciliation Project and other public  
bodies on May 25, 2006.*

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**Cover images courtesy of**

*The News & Record, Lewis A. Brandon, III, Rachel Goldstein, Kristi Parker, Laura Registrato and Matthew Spencer.*

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**COMMISSIONERS MUKTHA JOST, ROBERT PETERS, CYNTHIA BROWN, PATRICIA CLARK AND ANGELA LAWRENCE ARE SWORN IN AT CEREMONY ON JUNE 12, 2004. (NOT PICTURED, COMMISSIONERS MARK SILLS AND BARBARA WALKER.) (PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEWS & RECORD)**





## Introduction & Background





## INTRODUCTION

The Mandate of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) reflects that, “There comes a time in the life of every community when it must look humbly and seriously into its past in order to provide the best possible foundation for moving into a future based on healing and hope.” We offer this report in our Mandate’s spirit, acknowledging that healing, hope and reconciliation are long-term goals that must take place across what currently are deep divides of distrust and skepticism in our community.

Our task was to examine the “context, causes, sequence and consequences,” and to make recommendations for community healing around the tragedy in Greensboro, N.C., on Nov. 3, 1979, which resulted in the deaths of five anti-Klan demonstrators: César Vicente Cauce, 25; Michael Ronald Nathan, M.D., 32; William Evan Sampson, 31; Sandra Neely Smith, 28; and James Michael Waller, M.D., 36; and the wounding of demonstrators Paul Bermanzohn, Claire Butler, Tom Clark, Nelson Johnson, Rand Manzella, Don Pelles, Frankie Powell, Jim Wrenn; Klansman Harold Flowers, and news photographer David Dalton.

Even though we looked at a much bigger picture than any court has painted or than any one group of people can tell, this is still a story that is necessarily limited in its scope and depth. We do believe, however, that our efforts have taken us some distance away from the half-truths, misunderstandings, myths and hurtful interpretations that have marked the story until now. We hope that our contribution to Greensboro’s reckoning with its past – completed with the invaluable assistance of numerous participants and supporters in this community and elsewhere – will provide a solid foundation for the healing and hope that our Mandate foresees.



## BACKGROUND

On Nov. 3, 1979, in the absence of a dissuasive police presence, a caravan of white supremacists confronted demonstrators preparing for a “Death to the Klan” rally planned in the city’s black Morningside Homes public housing community by the Communist Workers Party (CWP), previously known as the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO). In addition to the five demonstrators killed, at least ten others were wounded, and numerous residents and other witnesses were traumatized. Klan and Nazi members, some of whom were filmed by news cameras as they shot into the crowd, claimed self-defense and were twice acquitted of all criminal charges by all-white juries.

After more than two decades, the two criminal trials, and a civil trial that found mem-





**COMMISSIONERS MARK SILLS, MUKTHA JOST AND  
BARBARA WALKER LISTEN DURING A PUBLIC HEARING.  
(PHOTO COURTESY OF NEWS & RECORD)**

bers of the Greensboro Police Department jointly liable with Klan and Nazi members for the wrongful death of one victim, many in the Greensboro community still did not feel that justice had been served. For this reason, former members of the CWP joined with other community members and supporters to initiate the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project (GTCRP), launching a democratic process that engaged the community in nominating and selecting the seven members of this independent Commission, empaneled on June 12, 2004.

We assessed the evidence gathered from the three trials, internal records from the Greensboro Police Department and federal law enforcement, newspaper and magazine articles, academic literature, and some 200 interviews and personal statements given in private and at our public hearings. The following pages summarize our findings, conclusions and recommendations after nearly two years of investigative work and community engagement.

The evidence and multiple interpretations that we have uncovered in our research reveal a richly complex story of how Nov. 3, 1979, happened and its meaning for the community. However, serious limitations in the resources available to us, as well as fear of and hostility toward our process, have restricted our ability to review all the evidence available. The truth we have found is necessarily imperfect because new facts might later come to light that would demand new or altered conclusions. Indeed it is our hope that others who come after us will continue to perfect the collective truth of this event. This is the very nature of scientific inquiry. While the facts of the incident are indeed complex, through rigorous review and impartial weighing of available evidence and corroboration, we have arrived at well-documented and supported conclusions.

We view this report as the beginning of a citizen effort toward investigation and dialogue, rather than the end.





**FIVE WHITE ROSES AT EACH PUBLIC HEARING SYMBOLIZED THE FIVE PEOPLE WHO DIED AS A RESULT OF THE VIOLENCE ON NOV. 3, 1979 -CÉSAR CAUCE, MICHAEL NATHAN, WILLIAM SAMPSON, SANDRA SMITH AND JAMES WALLER. (PHOTO BY KRISTI PARKER)**





## Findings & Conclusions





## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **■ INVOLVED PARTIES**

#### **Ku Klux Klan and the National Socialist Party of America (Nazi)**

The Commission finds that on the morning of Nov. 3, 1979, members of the Klan/Nazi caravan headed for Greensboro with malicious intent. At a minimum, they planned to disrupt the parade and assault the demonstrators (by throwing eggs), violating the marchers' constitutional rights to free speech and assembly. Further, we believe there is sufficient evidence to conclude that they intended to provoke a violent confrontation and that this was broadly understood among those present in the multiple planning discussions. Those who left their cars to engage in violence did so willingly. More importantly, Klan and Nazi members have admitted since the event that they intentionally came prepared to use deadly force in order to be victorious in any violence that occurred.

But not all caravan members bear equal responsibility. We find the heaviest burden of responsibility is on those (Roland Wood, Coleman Pridmore, Jack Fowler, David Matthews, and Jerry Paul Smith) who, after they returned to their cars and their path of exit was cleared, went to the trunk of the last car to retrieve weapons. They then fired at demonstrators, fatally wounding Nathan, Waller, and Cauce when they were unarmed. They also wounded Bermanzohn, Wrenn, Powell, Clark, Manzella and Dalton when they were unarmed. The fourth fatality, Sandi Smith, was also unarmed, although she was in the vicinity of someone who was firing at the Klansmen and Nazis and could have been hit by someone returning fire. Sampson had a handgun, and was firing it when he was fatally shot.

#### **Workers Viewpoint Organization (Communist Workers Party)**

We also find that some, albeit lesser, responsibility must lie with the demonstrators who beat on the caravan cars as they passed. Some CWP members also brought guns to the rally and fired them in the direction of the Nazi-Klan members. However, we find that the CWP fired after the Klan had fired a minimum of two shots and perhaps as many as five shots first. FBI evidence indicated that 18 shots were fired from locations occupied by the CWP and demonstrators and 21 were fired from locations oc-



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cupied by the Nazi-Klan. However, we find the multiple revisions by the FBI of its own testimony make it unreliable evidence.

The Commission finds that the WVO leadership was very naïve about the level of danger posed by their rhetoric and the Klan's propensity for violence, and they even dismissed concerns raised by their own members. However, we also find that this miscalculation was caused in part by the Greensboro Police Department, which did not inform either the WVO or Morningside residents about the Klan's plans and its coordination with other racist groups.

## **Greensboro Police Department**

Despite the obvious and important roles of the above participants, the majority of commissioners find the single most important element that contributed to the violent outcome of the confrontation was the absence of police.<sup>1</sup> Hostility between the WVO and white supremacist groups ran high and was inflamed by violent language on both sides. Yet vocal expression of political disagreement is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy. The two parties had met before in China Grove, N.C., in July 1979, exchanged insults and jeers, brandished weapons, and yet no violence resulted. We believe that this outcome in China Grove was due to the presence of three uniformed police officers, who did nothing other than be visibly present between the groups.

We find that it was reasonably foreseeable that any further contact between the groups would result in violence, given

- the heated and armed confrontation in China Grove, in which the protestors had burned the Confederate flag and the Klan and Nazis had been forced to retreat inside the building;
- the long history of the Klan as a terrorist organization that stirs fear and passion in communities targeted by this violence;
- intense political opposition between the two groups;
- aggressive verbal challenges made by the CWP;
- discussions among the Klan and Nazis about bringing guns.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Det. Jerry Cooper and GPD photographer J.T. Matthews were present, but did not make their presence known and so had no effect on preventing the violence.

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The police were fully aware of all this information, and in fact their own paid informant, the late Klansman Eddie Dawson, acted in a leadership role in bringing the two sides into contact. Dawson's police handlers had full knowledge of this role. Based on the confrontation at China Grove, we believe that even a small but noticeable police presence would almost certainly have prevented loss of life on Nov. 3, 1979.

*Nevertheless, police made decisions*

- not to warn the demonstration organizers about the known Klan and Nazi plans to confront and probably provoke physical violence, or that the Klan had obtained a copy of the parade permit;
- explicitly to be five to 20 blocks away, and in fact repeatedly direct officers away from the designated parade starting point, even after it was known that the caravan was heading there;
- among key event commanders not to monitor constantly the situation using hand radios;
- not to stop or even noticeably accompany the caravan as it headed to the starting point where police knew no officers were present;
- not to order tactical units to proceed toward the designated parade starting point in an attempt to get in between the Klan/Nazis and demonstrators, or even to get into standby position, after it was clear the caravan was heading toward the parade;
- not to intervene or stop most of the cars fleeing the scene after it was known that shots had been fired.

The GPD showed a stunning lack of curiosity in planning for the safety of the event. When Dawson expressed a desire to cancel the march, Detectives R.L. Talbott and Jerry Cooper and City Attorney Skip Warren did not ask why. Similarly, when Dawson requested a copy of the permit and admitted that he was a Klansman, Capt. Larry Gibson did not inquire about his intentions.

We find that the GPD's decisions and records of planning discussions indicate that they accepted uncritically almost everything informant Dawson said. When Dawson reported that any confrontation would happen at the end of the march, Capt. Trevor Hampton, Gibson and Lt. Sylvester Daughtry decided that the back up tactical units would not be in position until 30 minutes before the noon starting time of the parade,



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even though the assembly time publicly advertised on posters was at 11 a.m.

Likewise, the GPD knew that the Klan had a copy of the parade route and that Dawson had repeatedly stated that the Klan had met many times to discuss plans to follow the marchers, heckle them and possibly assault them by throwing eggs. No officer recalls any discussion in any planning meetings of the likely consequences of this assault on already emotionally charged anti-Klan demonstrators in a black neighborhood. In contrast, when the GPD received intelligence from a police officer that a Nazi from Winston-Salem planning to attend the march might bring a machine gun with the intent to "shoot up the place," the police summarily dismissed this information as an "unconfirmed rumor."

### ***Role of GPD Informant Dawson***

The role of Eddie Dawson as a police informant within the Klan exceeded that of a typical informant. Dawson made the initial racist, virulently anti-communist speech at the Klan rally designed to incite a confrontation with the WVO; he arranged for the assembly point for Klan and Nazi members prior to going to the parade; he was in regular contact with Klan leader Virgil Griffin to discuss plans to disrupt the parade; he obtained a copy of the parade permit and route; he drove the route with Klansmen the night before the parade; he pointed out the route prior to leaving the Klan assembly point; he rushed people into cars at 11 a.m. to get to the parade. When Klansmen leaving the house asked, "Who's running this thing?" Klan leader Virgil Griffin pointed to Dawson and said, "I guess he is." Eddie Dawson got in the lead car and led the caravan to the parade starting point.

Informants are by definition party to criminal activity, but we find that the decision to pay an informant and fail to intervene when he takes a leadership role to provoke and orchestrate a criminal act, with the full knowledge of police handlers, is negligent and unconscionably bad policing.

### ***Low profile***

The GPD records and testimony show that it was Deputy Chief Walter A. Burch (not Hampton, as often asserted), who made the decision to take a "low profile," keeping officers out of sight in order to avoid provoking a confrontation with the marchers. Given the enmity between police and WVO, we find that some version of "low pro-

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file” was indeed reasonable. However, the police discussion of this low-profile approach in relation to Nov. 3, 1979, assumes that there were only two choices available: full presence in riot gear or removing officers to locations too far away to intervene when guns were fired.

There was, however, a range of intermediate positions that also could have been considered “low profile.”

Since intelligence from multiple sources indicated that violence was likely, police clearly were negligent because they took no action to prevent it. However, nearly all commissioners further believe that the totality of evidence reasonably suggests to the layperson that mere negligence alone is not an adequate explanation. No evidence has been found that indicates there was any conspiracy between the police or between the police and the Klan/Nazis to kill the demonstrators. However, the knowledge and subsequent deliberate actions (and failures to act) on the part of key police officers directly contributed to the violence that the police knew was reasonably foreseeable. Even though no legal basis for law enforcement involvement in a conspiracy was found in the trials, the majority of commissioners believe there was intentionality among some in the department to fail to provide adequate information or to take steps to adequately protect the marchers. Not every officer was party to either the intelligence or key decisions, but certainly Cooper, Talbott, Capt. Byron Thomas (all from the Criminal Intelligence Division), Gibson, Daughtry (from the Field Services Bureau), Lt. Paul Spoon, and Hampton (from the Field Operations Bureau) all were present in intelligence meetings and participated in key decision-making.

While nearly all Commissioners find sufficient evidence that some officers were deliberately absent, we also unanimously concur that the conclusions one draws from this evidence is likely to differ with one’s life experience. Those in our community whose lived experience is of government institutions that fail to protect their interests are understandably more likely to see “conspiracy.” Those accustomed to reliable government protection are more likely to see “negligence,” or no wrongdoing on the part of law enforcement officers. We believe this is one reason the community is polarized in interpreting this event.

### *Change in parade starting point*

Police and city officials’ most often repeated reason for why there were no police



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present on Nov. 3, 1979, when the Klan and Nazi caravan arrived was that the WVO had changed the location of the parade starting point. However, the Commission finds that the GPD's own records and testimony reveal that this quite simply is not true. The WVO designated on its parade permit application that Everitt and Carver was the starting point. At the time that WVO parade organizer Nelson Johnson applied for the permit, he specifically explained to Gibson the discrepancy between the starting point and the information on WVO posters that mentioned the Windsor Center as a gathering place. Indeed, internal police records show that the discrepancy was repeatedly discussed in several police planning meetings and it was repeatedly emphasized that the starting point was to be at Everitt and Carver.

### *Protecting unpopular and hostile citizens*

The Commission finds strong evidence that members of the police department allowed their negative feelings toward Communists in general, and outspoken black activist and WVO leader Nelson Johnson in particular, to color the perception of the threat posed by these groups. At the same time, we find that the GPD also exhibited a clear pattern of underestimating the risks posed by the KKK, which amounted to a careless disregard for the safety of the marchers and the residents of the Morningside neighborhood where the rally took place.

We understand that police work is difficult, particularly in volatile social and political times. Complex decisions and rapid judgment calls are common, and police departments often have the difficult but crucial job of protecting those whose views are distasteful to the majority, who are hostile to the police themselves, and who may act to obstruct protection. For example, two days before the march, Nelson Johnson publicly declared, "We say to Mayor Jim Melvin and the police, stay out of our way. We will defend ourselves." On the morning of Nov. 3, 1979, as police officers attempted to contact Nelson Johnson to discuss the police arrangements for the parade, openly hostile protestors refused to speak with the officers and chanted "Death to the Pigs."

However, the Commission strongly emphasizes that hostility and verbal abuse did not preclude the marchers' right to police protection. The police knew this enmity existed. Nevertheless, Capt. Gibson delivered the explicit promise of protection for the safety of the marchers and their First Amendment rights when Johnson was issued a parade permit. This promise of protection was even more significant given the requirement of the parade permit that the protesters be unarmed. Unfortunately for the whole community, the police failed to carry out the promised protection.

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Police are public servants and have the duty to undertake due diligence to plan safeguards and provide protection even for people expressing unpopular points of view. Indeed, civil and human rights do not derive their meaning from their protection for the universally adored and cooperative. Rights only have meaning when they apply to everyone, even those whose views may be seen as threatening. Further, officers are surely trained to deal with this eventuality as it is a routine occurrence in police work. The inevitable tension between providing safety and protecting rights is territory that all healthy democracies must navigate.

## **Federal law enforcement**

Although not legally bound to do so, we believe it was immoral and unconscionable for the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms – which both had their own inside intelligence on the Klan and Nazis about the potential for violence on Nov. 3, 1979 – to fail to share that information with local law enforcement. This independent information, taken together with intelligence from Dawson, would have provided a more robust picture of the threat.

The BATF had an undercover agent among the Nazis, Bernard Butkovich. Although he certainly did nothing to prevent it, based on the information available to us we do not find that agent Butkovich acted to provoke the violence. Acting undercover often requires an agent to feign support for violent ideas, but the facts we have do not lead us to believe Butkovich incited these feelings where they did not already exist. However, federal agencies exercise very tight control over evidence relevant to their operations and agents. Therefore, as a general problem, citizens often find it extremely difficult to document any inappropriate behavior by federal agents.

## **Morningside Homes community**

The parade permit meant that the WVO had permission from the city to march. The WVO did not legally need permission from Morningside residents to march. However, as a self-described anti-racist organization explicitly advocating for the empowerment of working-class black people, it should have understood that it had an ethical obligation to ask permission of the residents before staging the parade in their neigh-



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borhood, rather than simply informing them. This is especially true given the risks involved with the nature of the march and organizers who had aggressively challenged the Klan and stoked animosity with the police.

Not all Morningside residents were comfortable with the planned march. Following the shootings, some expressed resentment that they had been exposed to risk and trauma. However, the WVO felt it had sufficient support and personal ties with the Morningside community after years of working on housing and education issues there. The WVO had held a meeting with the Neighborhood Residents Council (NRC) to review the plans for the march. Unfortunately, the NRC did not adequately inform Morningside residents about the upcoming event and must bear some of the responsibility for the breakdown in communication. While the WVO did leaflet in this and other public housing communities along the route, commissioners agree that the march organizers exposed Morningside residents to a risk they had not accepted as a community.

Finally, the fear produced by the history of the Klan and this event and its aftermath in particular means that many in black working-class communities, and especially former residents of Morningside, are still afraid to talk about this issue. For this reason there may well be other viewpoints in support of the WVO held by people who have not felt at liberty to speak.

## KEY ISSUES

### **Violent language and provocation**

Much of the public debate about the causes of the Nov. 3, 1979, incident has centered on the role of aggressive speech in bringing about violence.

The Klan's racist rhetoric was plainly intended to provoke. Just prior to the confrontation, Klan leader Virgil Griffin publicly told the audience at a Klan rally, "If you loved your children, you would go shoot 100 niggers and leave their bodies in the street." Eddie Dawson's poster, plastered in black public housing communities prior to the confrontation, bore the image of a lynched body with the warning to "communists, race mixers and black rioters. Even now the cross hairs are on the back of YOUR

NECK. It's time for some old fashioned American justice.”<sup>2</sup> The message of the film “Birth of a Nation” and of the speeches made at Klan and Nazi rallies glorified the oppression and murder of black people. These words are immoral and demand public rebuke. However, they also are words that are protected by the U.S. Constitution. The Klan and Nazis have the right to express these views.

Opponents of those views share the same rights. Therefore, the rhetoric used by the WVO was also constitutionally protected speech. Yet there is no doubt that the WVO embraced inflammatory language and identified with violent symbols. “Death to the Klan” was an unfortunate slogan for the parade. Although most have expressed regret for this language, survivors have argued that such language was common at the time and was intended to threaten an institution and ideology, rather than individuals, but such nuance was likely lost on Klan members.

Other language is more troubling. The WVO made a very militant challenge to the Klan via posters, and Paul Bermanzohn said at a news conference, “(The Klan) can and will be crushed ... They must be physically beaten back, eradicated, exterminated, wiped off the face of the earth. We invite you and your two-bit punks to come out and face the wrath of the people.” One of the WVO fliers said, “The dogs have no right to exist! They must be physically beaten and run out of town. This is the only language they understand.”<sup>3</sup>

Although both groups indulged in violent rhetoric, the cultural context of the time made the intent and effect of the rhetoric inherently unequal. Despite the inflammatory language and the ideological identification with violent international figures, the Communist Party within the United States does not have a historical pattern of terrorist acts.<sup>4</sup> What's more, communism has never been the dominant ideology in any part of the United States, nor has it ever enjoyed the support, direct or indirect, of law enforcement authorities. The same cannot be said of the Klan. Founded specifically as an insurrectionist terrorist organization, the Klan has counted among its members many elected and law enforcement officials, including at least one U.S. president.

Further the Klan and Nazis who were in the caravan backed up violent language with violent actions. For example, there were criminal convictions for shooting into a home that reportedly was serving liquor to both blacks and whites, conspiring to blow up a union hall in Greensboro, organizing paramilitary training camps for inciting a

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>4</sup> The Weathermen are an exception.



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race war, and planning to blow up a gas storage facility in Greensboro. There also were admissions of breaking the legs of a black man who was living with a white woman, talking about blowing up “race mixing” clubs and bookstores, and burning crosses on the lawns of blacks who had moved into white neighborhoods. In contrast, the most violent documented acts of the WVO were to engage in target shooting and karate training.

Since its founding, the Klan has been a terrorist group that carried out its threats. With two such divergent histories, the majority of Commissioners conclude that it is not reasonable to give the threats made by the two groups equal weight as they are not equivalent in intent or effect.

## **Injustice in the justice system**

Three trials addressed the wrongdoing of Nov. 3, 1979: a state criminal trial on capital murder charges; a federal criminal trial on charges that the shooters were motivated by racial hostility and violated the victims’ civil rights; and a civil trial of a lawsuit brought by widows of the victims and some of those who sustained injuries. Both criminal trials resulted in acquittals by all-white juries and brought widespread public outcry.

We find a problematic jury selection process led to producing panels unrepresentative of the community due to many factors including the following:

- until 1986, it was entirely legal to strike a potential juror from the panel based on his or her race;
- sources of jury pools under-represent the poor and people of color.

We believe that the unrepresentative juries undoubtedly contributed significantly to the verdicts.

Further, although an often repeated explanation for the acquittals is the CWP members’ failure to testify, we find that view is flawed for the following reasons:

1. The CWP members did cooperate with the federal criminal trial, which also resulted in acquittals.

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2. The State had other witnesses available to give testimony of the shooting and to “humanize the victims.”

3. The view does not take into account the environment of pervasive anti-communism in which the trials took place, nor the fact that CWP members faced pending criminal charges for riot that gave them reason to believe they could incriminate themselves or their associates by testifying.

The civil trial, which had a jury with one black member, resulted in the nation’s first finding that members of a U.S. police department (Klan informant handler Det. Cooper and parade event commander Lt. Spoon) were jointly liable with white supremacists for a wrongful death. While a victory in this regard, the outstanding moral question of the failure to find for the other four victims remained. The City paid nearly \$400,000 in settlement for all defendants, including Klan and Nazi defendants, in exchange for plaintiffs’ release of all defendants from future civil action. This settlement meant that the litigation had been resolved, but the pain and moral issues had not. The City’s payment of this settlement on behalf of the police officers, Klan and Nazi defendants gave the appearance to many, rightly or wrongly, of the City’s support for or alliance with the Klan and Nazis.

We find one of the most unsettling legacies of the shootings is the disconnect between what seems to be a common sense assessment of wrongdoing and the verdicts in the two criminal trials. When people see the shootings with their own eyes in the video footage, then know that the trials led to acquittals, it undermines their confidence in the legal system.

We also appreciate that, given this imperfection, it is necessary to err on the side of acquittals of the guilty to avoid conviction of the innocent. However, when the justice system fails to find people responsible when wrongs were committed, it sends a damaging signal that some crimes will not be punished, and some people will not be protected by the government. In addition, the majority of us believe that the system is not just randomly imperfect; rather, it tends to be disproportionately imperfect against people of color and poor people.

Truth commissions are neither mandated nor capable of “re-trying” court cases. Instead, our purpose was to take a fresh and more dispassionate look at the procedural and substantive issues involved in these trials and make our own assessment of what transpired and whether there were noticeable flaws in the process, either in violation of legal standards or basic notions of justice. Another of our aims in this inquiry is to reveal how the legal system inevitably reflects and also is influenced by the prevailing social and political contexts, and how in this particular case the system failed some expectations for justice.



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The chief purpose of a trial, whether criminal or civil, is not to uncover the “truth” of the events about which it is concerned. In this way, trials are fundamentally different from the task the GTRC has undertaken. Understanding the inherent limitations of what was accomplished in the courts helps us clarify and distinguish our own mission.

The three trials have illustrated each in their own way the limits of our court system as it is structured. The “retributive justice” model of the U.S. legal system confines judicial inquiries to the proof of a defendant’s guilt (criminal cases) or liability (civil cases), under a narrowly defined set of laws and rules of procedure. As a result, the examination of the role of individuals and institutions, outside of the particular defendants on trial, is limited solely to their relevance to those particular proceedings. Similarly, the scope for defining and addressing other types of harm and other stakeholders in the incident is also very narrow. The courtroom is the realm of technical knowledge and expertise, with little leeway for richness of context or consequences that surround wrongs.

The promise of “transformative justice” is in drawing the community to the table to discuss what wrongs were done, and to whom and by whom. Restorative justice also facilitates exchange of diverse perspectives on why these wrongs occurred and what should be done. In this way, restorative justice works in concert with retributive justice, not as a repeat or replacement of it. By looking at the issues more holistically, truth commissions can better diagnose the underlying causes and consequences, which may not be relevant to particular legal proceedings.

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## City government and community response

Although the GPD Internal Affairs report was ostensibly released publicly to “make the facts known” about Nov. 3, 1979, we found that the public investigation report contradicts the police department’s own internal documentation in the following ways:

- The internal affairs report underestimated the number of Klansmen and Nazis expected to come to the rally and discounted the discussions of guns the groups had in their planning.
- Concealed that an informant in the Klan had provided the police with this information for almost a month prior to the march.
- Concealed knowledge of the prior confrontation between the WVO and Klan/Nazis in China Grove and the aggressive challenges made by the WVO to the Klan.
- Denied knowledge of two gathering points for the parade.
- Omitted key officer testimony and left out several crucial transmissions from the radio transcript.

Based on this evidence the majority of Commissioners find that both the GPD and key city managers deliberately misled the public regarding what happened on Nov. 3, 1979, the planning for it and the investigation of it. The majority of Commissioners conclude that this was done to shift the responsibility away from the police department.

This report fits into an unfortunate pattern of city response to the tragedy. In the wake of the killings, city leaders (formal and informal) appeared more concerned with protecting the city’s image and clamping down on citizen protest in the interest of “security,” than with meeting the needs of its most vulnerable citizens and helping the community process the event and heal. Evidence of this includes

- attempting to influence media coverage;
- marginalizing findings of the Citizen Review Committee established after the shootings;
- attempting to stop the Feb. 2, 1980, march against racist violence;
- engaging with the Justice Department’s Community Relations Service, which intimidated people from participating in protests.



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For the majority of Greensboro residents, this response by city leaders reinforced the city's image of civility and distanced them from this event. Likewise, the interpretation of the violence as a "shootout" between two "hate groups" who were "outsiders" is so often repeated by officials and in the media that it has become the dominant community attitude. The rush to find a simple answer for the question, "Why Greensboro?" conveniently kept the community from looking at the complexity and at its own role or responsibility. This response effectively polarized the community, despite changes that did occur, such as the enactment of anti-discrimination efforts in city employment and the change to a district system for representation on City Council.

For the disempowered communities in Greensboro, the city's repressive response served to compound suspicions that the police had some hand in the violence and city officials were unwilling to undertake a good faith investigation into wrongdoing. Further, the underhanded manner in which the city attempted to suppress citizen protest worked to foster additional suspicion and fear. These responses fit with a larger pattern that persists today and can be seen in the city's relations with the GTRC (see below).

The media also played an important role in the community's response to this tragedy. While the newspapers fulfilled their duty to report on the basic facts of the event, in general we find the mainstream newspapers failed to provide in-depth coverage of the context of the shooting. There was little coverage of why the conflict happened in Greensboro or of police involvement. Rather, the daily coverage tended to focus blame on the two "outsider extremist" sides: the CWP and Klan/Nazis. On the other hand, we found the weekly African American-owned Carolina Peacemaker with a predominantly African American readership provided more in-depth contextual coverage, better allowing its readers to decide for themselves the meaning of the event.

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## Fear and silence

Increased fear after Nov. 3, 1979, has had devastating effects on our community. Morningside residents were victimized by the shooting happening in their midst, and again by the curfew and clamp down on protest. Neighborhood residents felt sanctioned by the city because this tragedy occurred in their community. Subsequent rumors of violence and red-baiting suppressed protest. Fear of economic backlash for being associated with those clearly singled out for the city's ire, the Communists, further traumatized residents of Morningside and people throughout the city. People who were friends and associates of CWP members, or who even encountered them in restaurants or on the street, were afraid even to be seen with them because they risked loss of jobs, homes, funding for their community projects and the like.

The CWP members themselves, in addition to losing friends, jobs and more, also felt victimized by being denied justice in the court system, being placed under surveillance and being demonized in the mainstream media.

The fear surrounding these killings has not gone away. In our own process, we have had many citizens who insisted on confidential statements – not because of the content of their statements, but because they feared economic or social retaliation simply for talking to us. After “talking with people,” several key figures who originally agreed to speak changed their minds, leading us to conclude that they were discouraged from participating. There are many people who could have come forward with information but who did not because of this fear. Fear and the use of vengeful backlash or even its threat hampers the community's understanding and ability to move forward. We find it ironic that so many of the city's leaders insisted that there was no point to establishing the GTRC because, in the words of one city council member, “The real truth is that it's a big yawn for this community.”<sup>5</sup> Such a statement leads us to believe many of our elected leaders are either horribly out of touch with, willfully blind to, or simply unconcerned about the lingering pain and the stifling workings of power in this community.

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<sup>5</sup> “Inquiry shaping how city is perceived,” *News & Record*, March 23, 2005.



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## Grassroots organizing and connection to community concerns

Although WVO/CWP members felt that they had fully engaged with the Morningside community, it is apparent that there were many residents who felt uninformed and did not want the “Death to the Klan” rally in their community. The demonstrators’ protest issues were grounded in the community’s economic and social concerns, but their politics and tactics were not. Once joining the WVO/CWP, the organizers had the added interest of building their party, which further distanced them from the grassroots community.

Further, there were even those among the membership who raised concerns and critiques of the organizing strategy and were overruled and marginalized by the top-down leadership. We believe a top-down leadership style is neither empowering nor democratic, and ultimately fails as an organizing tactic.

Despite the CWP’s use of violent rhetoric and its hierarchical leadership style, we want to affirm the legitimacy of union organizing and the other economic and social justice struggles in which CWP members were engaged. We disagree with the common practice of demonizing those in the community who challenge the status quo, then looking the other way when they are mistreated.

We find that through organizations including the Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP), the Greensboro CWP members had worked for more than a decade in Morningside and other black communities, seeking to empower residents to achieve improvements in areas including employment, housing and public education.

GAPP’s programs enjoyed support from many in the black community and had no record of violence. Further, the economic and social injustices against which they struggled amounted to failures of government to meet humane standards of living adequate to basic human needs. Also, despite the tragedy and demonization, many of those organizers have remained in Greensboro and continued this work.

Since many poor workers were employed by N.C. textile mills, focusing attention on conditions there made sense both to local organizers and other N.C. organizers with whom they were connected through the African Liberation Support Committee and later through the Workers Viewpoint Organization, a national group that followed Mao Tse- Tung’s philosophy of targeting poor workers and rural peasants as the most powerful source of revolt.

Resurgence of the Klan in the mid 1970s, in keeping with its long history of sowing

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fear and divisions through racial violence and its threat, quickly emerged as the biggest obstacle to multiracial organizing in the mills, prompting the WVO's "Death to the Klan" campaign. It was an effort shared by unions and other organizers nationwide as the 1970s economic recession spurred a broad revival of white supremacy.

## **Firearms**

We believe that when guns are present, particularly in the hands of strongly opposed groups confronting each other, the likelihood of violence is often increased.

However, while the idea of armed self-defense is accepted and deeply imbedded in our national identity and tradition, there is a double standard by which armed black people are seen as an unacceptable threat. Klan and Nazis' propensity for carrying heavy firearms was not discussed in intelligence meetings. On the other hand, Capt. Gibson remarked that "My concern was with Nelson Johnson's history of inciting riots. And when we had those intelligence briefings (on the Klan and Nazis plans), that remained my concern. There was nothing in those briefings that concerned me a whole lot." Further, the fact that jurors accepted the dismissal of the first two shots on Nov. 3, 1979, fired by the Klan, as "calming" shots in their consideration of the self-defense argument is astonishing.

One positive legacy of Nov. 3, 1979, is a city ordinance that forbids anyone from carrying a firearm within 500 feet of a public demonstration.

## **Racism**

We have been constantly asked during our process, "Was Nov. 3, 1979, really about race?" Labor organizer Si Kahn offered a clear answer when he said in our first hearing, "Scratch the surface of any issue in the South and you will find race."

We found that the events of Nov. 3, 1979, are woven through with issues of race and class. Consider these elements:



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- A group of demonstrators aiming to empower laborers in a poor black neighborhood were holding a “Death to the Klan” rally.
  - The leading organizer of the rally was a local black activist who was outspoken on issues of racial inequality. This leader was widely demonized for his role in the city’s traumatic 1969 incident of mass racial unrest prompted by the “Dudley/A&T Revolt.”
  - The “Death to the Klan” marchers were shot down by Klan and Nazis who were twice acquitted by all-white juries.
  - The city acted to try to prevent subsequent citizen protest against the Klan and white supremacist violence.

Imagine for a moment that these elements would have been racially reversed, viewed as a photographic negative. Imagine a group of demonstrators is holding a demonstration against black terrorism in the affluent white community of Irving Park. A caravan of armed black terrorists is allowed to drive unobstructed to the parade starting point, and photos are taken by the police as demonstrators are shot dead. Most of the cars are then allowed to flee the scene, unpursued, even as they threaten neighborhood pedestrians by pointing shotguns through the windows. The defendants are tried and acquitted by an all-black jury. The first shots – fired by the blacks screaming “Shoot the Crackers!” and “Show me a Cracker with guts and I’ll show you a black man with a gun!” – are described by black defense attorneys and accepted by jurors as “calming shots.” Meanwhile, the city government takes steps to block citizen protest of black terrorist violence including a curfew in the white neighborhood. The scenario is so unlikely as to be preposterous. Yet, in racial reverse, it is exactly what happened.

Racism, it goes without saying, divides our community and suppresses dialogue. It also routinely acts through institutions to disadvantage entire groups of people. This is often so in the justice system, which was created by white leaders to protect the interests of the majority power structure. The GTRC applauds the efforts of those in our community working to bring down these divides. It is our sincere hope that we, by analyzing our history and identifying the impediments to reconciliation, have provided guidance for our community to evolve into one where people of all races are equally respected and protected.

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## CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of Nov. 3, 1979, were both immediate and long-lasting. As we gathered statements in private settings and public hearings, we heard about the magnitude of consequences directly or indirectly affecting those who were in Morning-side Homes on that fatal morning, as well as people who were not present, including family members and even those yet unborn. We heard how Greensboro residents and social justice activists nationwide were impacted by that day.

Both negative and positive consequences emerged. Beyond the deaths and physical injuries themselves, negative consequences included:

- individual psychological trauma, depression, anger and fear;
- strained relationships, broken marriages and estranged children;
- economic retaliation and social isolation against CWP members and their associates, including loss of jobs and economic hardship, surveillance and a feeling of being under siege;
- general distrust of police, the justice system, elected officials and the media;
- exacerbated race and class tensions;
- an upsurge in racist violence and hate group activity;
- chilled organizing and political activism
- increased distrust of outsiders, denial of responsibility for problems;
- tacit approval of violence against political dissenters.

Positive consequences that emerged included:

- a strengthened resolve for political activism for some;
- a clearer view for many privileged residents of concerns about the justice system held by many poor and minority residents.
- a possible decision on the part of some community leaders to stop opposing a district system of City Council elections.



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## TRUTH-SEEKING AND RESISTANCE

Finally, as a grassroots citizen effort that challenges the status quo, we have learned firsthand that a pattern of resisting change and suppressing the efforts of those who seek it continues in Greensboro. It became clear for the entire city with the revelations that prompted the police chief's sudden resignation early this year. They involved high-level misconduct including institutionalized racial profiling and wire surveillance of private citizens including our own executive director. Other elements of the city's official response to our process included the following:

- City Council voted 6-3, with the three black members dissenting, to oppose the truth and reconciliation process.
- Council members promoted rumors about the GTRC intimidating opponents and sowed confusion about our funding and our relationship to the GTCRP.
- Information known only to the GTRC, police and city officials was leaked to the media, jeopardizing GTRC public hearing testimony.
- Police officials met with representatives of Mount Zion Baptist Church without GTRC staff about a GTRC event planned there.
- Prospective statement givers and community dialogue participants indicated being discouraged by people outside the GTRC from participating.

Our experience, which also included mysteriously broken file cabinets containing research documents and personnel files, leads us to believe even more strongly that our process is relevant and important for revealing the deep brokenness in our community and leaders' tendency toward suppression of truth-seeking and other efforts to insist on accountability. Although done in the name of protecting community stability, this end does not justify the means. Stability is not the same as justice, which must be established if the city hopes to restore trust and to heal.

As the GTRC met with surveillance, intimidation and rumor-mongering at the institutional level, at the personal level we found indifference, fear and resistance. The mayor once commented to us that he found it "unappetizing" to engage in a process that speaks openly about issues of poverty, labor, capital, race and hate. It appears that many in our community share his distaste.

This discomfort and its roots must be honestly examined by individuals and the community as a whole. As Thoreau said, it takes two to speak the truth: one to speak and one to hear.





**CHILDREN OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE EVENTS OF NOV. 3, 1979.**  
**(PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NEWS & RECORD AND KRISTI PARKER.)**





**Moving Forward:  
Recommendations**





## MOVING FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS

The retributive justice system is by nature oriented toward the individual, and separates that individual from the community in which both perpetrators and victims live. In so doing, this system fails to address wider community harms. Aside from (unequal) opportunities to serve on juries, everyday community members are not often viewed as stakeholders in the process, which is controlled by “experts” who often cannot relate to the experiences and perspectives of communities of poor people and people of color. As a result, most of the community has no involvement in righting wrongs.

As an exercise in restorative justice, we have taken a larger view and examined the wide range of stakeholders harmed by the events of Nov. 3, 1979, and by official decisions surrounding it. Our recommendations seek to address the direct harm of those who were killed, wounded or psychologically traumatized, as well as what we believe were indirect harms suffered by groups including:

- residents of the City of Greensboro, which lost ground on human relations progress made after school desegregation;
- relatives and associates of both CWP demonstrators and Klan-Nazi shooters, who were stigmatized and suffered various forms of backlash;
- progressive grassroots organizers whose work was made more difficult by such processes as red-baiting;
- mill workers and other low-income residents who would have been beneficiaries of more successful organizing for racial and economic justice.

Recognizing that there is no way to undo the harm caused to individuals and communities on Nov. 3, 1979, we believe there are positive steps toward reconciliation, justice and reparations that can be undertaken. With these goals in mind, we offer the following recommendations to the residents of Greensboro, to the government of the City and Guilford County, and to other local institutions. Previous commissions and review boards have gone before us and offered their own recommendations, some of which we wish to place again before the public since they have yet to be implemented.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> If organizations to whom recommendations are made feel financially unable to act on them, we recommend that they make use of the extensive grant library housed in the Glenwood Branch by the Greensboro Public Library. [www.greensborolibrary.org](http://www.greensborolibrary.org).



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## 1. Acknowledgement

This section includes steps to recognize rights and responsibilities and acknowledge that wrongs were committed and harms occurred. Usually such steps are called reparations and aim to make restitution, compensate for harms, rehabilitate, provide satisfaction to victims and take measures to prevent future abuses. Nothing can restore a loved one's life that has been taken, or fully restore the health and well-being of those battered by the events, but we believe that some meaningful gestures toward acknowledgment and redress can help those most harmed see a better future ahead. We believe that facing the truth about the past is an important first step toward repair. This section also includes measures to incorporate the information about Nov. 3, 1979, into the city's official history and collective memory, attend to the second generation of survivors, promote dialogue and commemorate what happened.

*a. The City should formally recognize that the events of Nov. 3, 1979, provided a tragic, but important occasion in our city's history; it should make a proclamation that lifts up the importance of that date in the history of the city.*

*b. Individuals who were responsible for any part of the tragedy of Nov. 3, 1979, should reflect on their role and apologize – publicly and/or privately – to those harmed.*

Throughout this truth and reconciliation process, some individuals (Roland Wayne Wood and Nelson Johnson, for example) have issued apologies – in private, in the media and at the GTRC's public hearings – about the roles they played in the events of Nov. 3, 1979. Such apologies offer hope that community reconciliation is possible around these events. We believe that sincere apologies, even after 26 years, are important because they open up the possibility for a renewed relationship and dialogue between otherwise alienated individuals and groups.

*c. The Greensboro Police Department and the City of Greensboro should issue public apologies for their failure to protect the public – specifically, the Communist Workers Party demonstrators, Morningside Homes residents, media representatives and others present at the shooting site. These institutions also should issue an apology to city residents for not appropriately acknowledging the event and taking the necessary steps for community healing.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of institutional apologies, we recommend that the Greensboro Police Department and City look to the recent institutional apologies offered by Wachovia Bank for the role their predecessor company played in financing slavery and by the United States Senate for failing to enact anti-lynching legislation.

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*d. Others who were involved in the shootings on Nov. 3, 1979, and who regret the role they played are encouraged to offer restitution to the victims by making contributions in their name to support the public monument commemorating this tragedy (see recommendation 1.h) or to organizations advocating for civil and workers rights and other economic justice initiatives.*

*e. The Greensboro Historical Museum and the International Civil Rights Museum should work either collaboratively or independently to create exhibits commemorating the tragic shootings on Nov. 3, 1979.*

*f. As described in its Declaration of Intent, the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, along with GTRC Report Receivers, should host community forums at which this report will be reviewed and discussed.*

A portion of these discussions should offer opportunities for former members of the Communist Workers Party, former residents of Morningside Homes, former Klan and Nazi members, and others directly involved and impacted by the events to engage in meaningful discussions.<sup>8</sup>

*g. The religious leadership in Greensboro should plan and facilitate a healing workshop or retreat for the children of CWP members, shooters and others directly involved in the events of Nov. 3, 1979. Furthermore, these children should be actively consulted in all of the reconciliation and reparation efforts recommended in this report.*

*h. A public monument should be built on the site of the shootings to honor those killed and wounded on Nov. 3, 1979.*

A committee should be formed under the auspices of the City's Human Relations Commission for the purpose of planning and fundraising for this monument, and should include representatives from the surviving demonstrators and their children, former residents of Morningside Homes, neighborhood associations, and other grass-roots groups. The committee should decide on the design of the monument.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One model for such meaningful dialogue around tragic events can be found in the work of Father Michael Lapsley at the Institute for Healing of Memories.

<sup>9</sup> One Commissioner has suggested that the monument be in the form of a sculpture made from guns voluntarily donated.



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## 2. Institutional reform

This group of recommendations is intended as part of the effort to prevent future abuses and ensure that when wrongs do occur there is an adequate response.

### a. City and County government

*i. All city and county employees should be paid a living wage; all city and county contractors and sub-contractors should be required to pay workers a living wage.*

Our research into the context and consequences of Nov. 3, 1979, revealed a socio-economic divide that underlies the events of Nov. 3 and continues to plague our community. The City of Greensboro and Guilford County should adopt and fully enforce an ordinance that requires that all employees of the city and county, as well as all employees of those companies that contract or sub-contract to provide services or products to the city or county, be paid a “living wage” as determined by the North Carolina Justice Center.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, we recommend that the City and County jointly seek enabling legislation that will allow them to provide incentives to businesses that pay a living wage to all employees.

*ii. All city and county employees should engage in anti-racism training*

The City of Greensboro and Guilford County should contract with a training group such as the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond<sup>11</sup> to prepare and conduct an anti-racism curriculum – like the Institute’s “Undoing Racism” workshops – as part of the orientation required for all new employees. This training should include developing a definition of racism, both institutional and personal; developing an understanding of the ways that it impacts mental health for individuals; and developing ways to recognize it and work towards its elimination. The training should sensitize employees about the impacts of racism on the community.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ncjustice.org](http://www.ncjustice.org)

<sup>11</sup> [www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org)

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Furthermore, every employee already working for the City or County should be required to complete anti-racism training within a period not to exceed two years. Descriptions of the contents and outcomes of the trainings should be made available to the public. Following the training, employees should have opportunities to engage with the community members they most affect in their work in order to help them gain greater insight from residents about how racism has impacted their community relations (e.g. police officers should meet face-to-face with residents in the neighborhoods they serve in order to better understand the role racism has played in poor police/community relations).

## **b. City government**

### ***i. The City should issue annual reports on race relations and racial disparities.***

The May 1980 Citizens Review Committee report made the following recommendation: “The Human Relations Commission should be adequately staffed to monitor human and race relations and to possess the capability of in-house research and documentation.” While this has largely been accomplished, we recommend that the City go further by regularly consulting with and informing residents about the status of race relations and progress on erasing racial disparities within city government as well as within the city as a whole. Such an annual report will ensure continued discussions and work toward ending racial disparities and the impact of racism. Community leaders should issue their own report on racial disparities and racism to complement the City’s report.

### ***ii. The Mayor’s Mosaic Project<sup>12</sup> should be continued and expanded as planned to include more people from all sectors of the community.***

The May 1980 Citizens Review Committee report recommended the following: “The City Council and other organizations in the City should provide leadership in an effort to break down the barriers which separate the citizens in our community.” We believe that the Mayor’s Mosaic Project is a substantial response to this recommendation. Given the low levels of cross-cultural trust in Greensboro, the city needs trust-building programs like the Mosaic Project, the value of which has affirmed by its first participants.

### ***iii. A citizen’s committee should be established immediately by the Human Relations Commission to create both temporary and permanent police review boards.***

<sup>12</sup> [www.ci.greensboro.nc.us/mosaic](http://www.ci.greensboro.nc.us/mosaic)



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***The committee's role would be to determine the respective boards' purposes, powers, funding, and relationships to the city government structure.***

In light of the overwhelming current public call for truth-seeking and truth-telling with regard to racism and other corruption in the Greensboro Police Department – including allegations of links between this corruption and the historical events including Nov. 3, 1979, and even the Dudley/A&T Student Revolt in 1969 – we recommend that the City of Greensboro immediately establish a short-term citizen's review board to examine these allegations.

We recommend the permanent board in the interest of ongoing police accountability and community trust. Its members should rotate on a regular basis.

Both boards should have subpoena power as well as significant enforcement power and should include representatives from each City Council district. In addition, the review boards should include representatives from the Human Relations Commission, the Greensboro Bar Association, the Greensboro Neighborhood Congress, the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, the Greensboro chapter of the NAACP, and representatives of the community's spiritual leaders. The organizations represented should appoint their own board members.

### **c. County government**

***i. The Guilford County Board of Commissioners should commit to addressing the need for increasing funding to Departments of Social Services and Public Health, two key agencies serving low-income residents, in order to expand and enhance staff and services, and to fund staff sensitivity training.***

***ii. Social work departments should work in conjunction with advocacy and faith organizations to: (1) document the need for increased funding based on information from service providers and clients, and (2) urge state and federal policymakers to increase funding to Social Services and the Health Department commensurate to meet the need in Guilford County.***

Significant reductions in federal, state and county funding available to Social Services and the Health Department has resulted in understaffing of these agencies and increased case loads for the remaining staff, which contributes to insensitivity to clients and inability to provide needed services.

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*iii. The Guilford County Schools should create a curriculum based on the events of Nov. 3, 1979, for use in public elementary and secondary schools.*

The Commission recommends that the Guilford County Schools contract with an appropriate curriculum development provider<sup>13</sup> to create a curriculum for elementary and secondary schools about the context, causes, sequence and consequences of the events of Nov. 3, 1979. This curriculum could include the following topics: the actual events of Nov. 3, 1979, the history of many civil rights organizations, labor movements and white supremacist organizations; and related legal issues (definitions, roles of prosecutors and defense, jury selection, the importance of jury duty, retributive vs. transformative justice, etc.). The GTRC report itself could be made part of this curriculum.

The curriculum also should include segments and open discussions that address related context issues including anti-racist education about slavery and respecting diversity.

#### **d. Justice system**

*i. Citizens as well as city and state officials should push for enabling legislation, if necessary, to create a community justice center in Greensboro, then make sure its existence is well-publicized.*

The outcomes of the three trials following Nov. 3, 1979, highlighted the limits of our retributive justice system, reflecting a need for more opportunities to apply restorative justice. These limitations, combined with the low levels of trust in the justice system among people of color and poor people lead us to recommend the creation of a community justice center in Greensboro. A good example is the Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC)<sup>14</sup> in Brooklyn, N.Y. Through the RHCJC, the Red Hook District Attorney's office used the center to process misdemeanor cases by first assessing underlying problems that led to the alleged criminal activity. Care is taken to ensure the public's safety; sentences incorporate available RHCJC services including intensive drug treatment, mediation, anger management, high school equivalency classes and youth groups.

Citizens as well as city and state officials should push for enabling legislation, if necessary, to create a community justice center in Greensboro, then make sure its

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<sup>13</sup> Possibilities are the Center for Diversity Education (<http://eduweb.unca.edu/diversityed/>) or the North Carolina Association of Educators ([www.ncae.org](http://www.ncae.org)).

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.brooklynda.org/Redhook/red\\_hook.htm](http://www.brooklynda.org/Redhook/red_hook.htm)



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existence is well-publicized.

***ii. The protocol for selecting jurors should be revised to expand the pool of potential jurors.***

Currently, potential jurors are selected from a list created by the Department of Motor Vehicles, which compiles the list using driver's license and voter registration data. Because these lists are not representative of the community as a whole, we recommend that state law be modified so that the pool of potential jurors can be drawn from additional lists such as utility bills, welfare rolls and the U.S. Postal Service's database of address changes.

Citizens as well as city and state officials should push for enabling legislation to expand the pool of potential jurors to be more representative of the community as a whole.

#### **e. Local media outlets**

***i. The largest local newspaper, the Greensboro News & Record, should act alone or in concert with other media outlets including the Carolina Peacemaker, Yes! Weekly, and the Rhinoceros Times to host a citywide citizen group that would comment on news process, content, quality and ethics.***

The absence of in-depth local news coverage of the context of Nov. 3, 1979, and its aftermath played a central role in the community misunderstanding of that event. As Greensboro community members struggle decades later to reconcile the competing views of why the tragedy occurred and what should be done now, the media can play an important role in helping community members move beyond contested facts, frames and claims to a common understanding. In addition to informing the public, media can and should play a role in fostering dialogue and exchange of views.

Also, a diverse citizen group could improve local journalism and the community-building role it can play. Citizen input should be solicited for: story development, source development, recognizing other perspectives, critique of news coverage, commentary on newspaper practices and suggestions for better addressing community concerns.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Grants are available to involve citizen input in newspaper reporting from foundations such as the Pew Center for Civic Journalism ([www.pewcenter.org](http://www.pewcenter.org)). Other resources are available from organizations such as the Kettering Foundation ([www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)), Grade the News ([www.gradethenews.org](http://www.gradethenews.org)), and Community Journalism ([www.rtnda.org/resources/cjgs.pdf](http://www.rtnda.org/resources/cjgs.pdf)).

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## **f. Other institutions**

*i. Other community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce should engage in anti-racism training similar to that described in Recommendation 2.a.ii.*

*ii. The City of Greensboro and other organizations should provide resources to support the participation of grassroots leaders in local or out-of-state programs and activities that affirm and enhance their leadership ability.*

Many of the existing leadership programs sponsored through prestigious organizations like the Center for Creative Leadership are generally cost prohibitive to low income grassroots leaders. Citizens are rarely empowered to hold institutions and power figures accountable for injustices in the community. Community institutions that impact the entire community across race and class lines are usually composed of middle/upper class and highly educated people. This leadership needs to be more diverse to include lived experience of all sectors of the community so all perspectives can be given adequate consideration in the policies and practices of the city and its institutions.

Reconciliation can happen when diverse leaders are in the same room, learning from each other and developing personal relationships. These leadership programs should be easily accessible to the widest range of leaders from diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds for the maximum benefit to all involved.<sup>16</sup>

*iii. In response to unresolved crises or lingering issues in the community, such as the issues surrounding the events of Nov. 3, 1979, city officials, religious leaders and civic organizations should play an active role in acknowledging, investigating and providing open forums for discussion.*

## **3. Criminal justice and civil remedies**

*a. The current investigations into the alleged corruption in the Greensboro Police Department, including the surveillance of citizens, should be thoroughly and expeditiously completed. We recommend that the reports of these investigations be publicly released once they are finalized and a town hall meeting held to solicit*

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<sup>16</sup> An example of a program with similar goals and methods is the Greensboro Civic Entrepreneurship Initiative sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trust that took place from 1998 through 2000



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*citizen questions and feedback. If appropriate, criminal prosecutions or civil action should be pursued to help heal the damaged credibility of the police department and reassure the citizens that there is accountability for illegal acts done by the city's agents.*

#### **4. Citizen transformation/engagement**

*a. Recognizing the role they play in creating the environment for events like Nov. 3, 1979, individual community members must commit to understanding issues of capital, labor, race, poverty, oppression, privilege and justice, and exploring ways to have a positive impact on the way they play out in the community.*

Individuals should take the initiative to engage in study and dialogue within diverse groups to understand various ideologies or other beliefs present in the community, especially unpopular ones. They should seek to understand their own part in community problems as well as their potential role in finding workable solutions.

Institutions should exist for the welfare of ALL citizens in a healthy democracy. The process of pushing institutions to become accountable to the citizens they are supposed to serve assumes and involves a collective citizenry that understands and practices principles of democracy and participation. In a large democracy such as ours, this is a learned skill that includes responsibilities, rights and privileges.

*b. Individuals, like institutions, can benefit from anti-racism and diversity education programs, and we encourage people to take advantage of pre-designed programs they first evaluate for both breadth and depth.*

Unless individuals learn based on an alternative analysis of the society we live in and unlearn biases and misinformation at the same time, many diversity programs may become mere "Band-aids" rather than solutions. The following questions should be asked of any such program: Does it provide historical perspective on power, privilege, oppression, and economic and social injustice? Do people learn about the various manifestations of racism, classism, sexism and other forms of oppression? Are participants given the opportunity to examine their individual roles?

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## The way forward

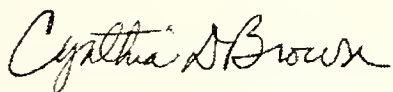
*While the above recommendations are directed toward specific institutions, we recommend that all grassroots community organizations, religious leaders and, specifically, the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, work collectively with each other and city and county government to advocate for the effective implementation of these recommendations.*

*To other communities considering processes to seek the truth and work for reconciliation around tragic, unjust events in their own histories, we heartily recommend the truth and reconciliation model as such a tool.*

*We believe the truth and reconciliation process in Greensboro opened up the debate around Nov. 3, 1979, in a positive way and has successfully engaged a broad spectrum of the community in an effort that offers hope for reconciliation. As a Commission that looks a bit like Greensboro in microcosm, we found that this process — and our own struggle to hear and understand each other — had a profound impact on our perceptions of the issues we explored. Our individual and collective commitment to the truth helped us persevere. And the human stories and emotions we encountered along the way moved us to do our best to leave behind a legacy we hope will serve Greensboro for years to come. We cannot say what the future will hold for this community or what the long-term impact of this process will look like, but we hope that this process also serves as a learning tool for others in this country who, like Greensboro, are burdened by a legacy of hurt and inspired by the possibility of honestly coming to terms with their own history.*



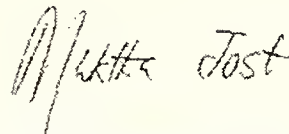
Respectfully submitted to the residents of Greensboro, the City, the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project and other public bodies on May 25, 2006, by the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission:



**Cynthia Brown**



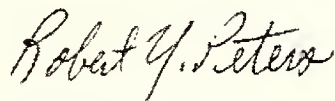
**Patricia Clark**



**Dr. Muktha Jost**

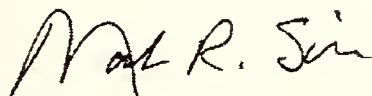


**Angela Lawrence**

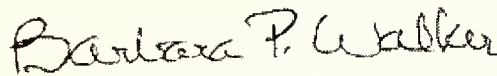


**Robert Peters**

(subject to his concurring opinion)<sup>17</sup>



**Rev. Dr. Mark Sills**



**Barbara Walker**

<sup>17</sup> Commissioner reflections can be found in the annex of the complete report.

# Paust



**A VOLUNTEER VIEWS DISPLAYS AT A PUBLIC HEARING.  
(PHOTO BY KRISTI PARKER)**





**Acknowledgements**



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Andrus Family Fund	\$185,000
Anonymous Fund	\$2,000
Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro	\$13,000
Ervin L. Brisbon Fund	\$6,000
Fenwick Foundation	\$1,000
InSight Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation	\$1,500
JEHT Foundation	\$150,000
NC Humanities Council	\$1,200
Romano Family Fund	\$10,000
Julian Price Family Fund	\$2,000
Wachovia Foundation	\$1,000
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation	\$30,000

### Grassroots donations

At its heart, this work is a grassroots effort, so generous donations from everyday individuals have sustained the GTRC. The following individuals and organizations contributed either through direct financial donations, fundraiser attendance or other gifts.

Carolyn Allen	Phyllis Carter
Vance Arnold	Justin Catanoso & Laurelyn Dossett
Terry Austin	Stone Circles
Cleta Baker	Patricia Clark
Ira & Susie Bell	The Community Church of Chapel Hill
Paul & Sally Bermanzohn	Sally Cone
Stephen & Pat Bocckino	Constance Curry
Mary Beth Boone	Eileen Curry
Lewis A. Brandon, III	George Dimock
Ann O'L Brown	Grant Draper
Millicent Brown	Dean Driver



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Linda Dunn  
Episcopal Diocese of NC  
Mary Ellen B. Fairchild  
Faith Community Church  
John Farmer  
Stephen Flynn  
Kathryn Foran  
Bob Foxworth  
Herbert & Jane Foy  
Terrence Gleeson  
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Mary Hennessey  
Brenda Hines  
Daisy Holland  
Rev. Z.N. & Charlene Holler  
Claudia Horwitz  
George & Sara House  
Martha Hughes-James  
Spoma Jovanovic  
Nelson & Joyce Johnson  
Randy & Grace Johnston  
Mark & Muktha Jost  
Charles Jones  
Sue & James F. Keith, Jr.  
John & Ellen Kepchar  
Robin Kirk  
Julianne Knight  
Timothy & Robin Lane  
Anthony Ledford  
Neil Lerner  
Liberation Baptist Church  
Kay Lovelace  
Lisa Magarrell  
Bishop Chip Marble  
Randall Mardus  
Easter Maynard & John Parker  
Vicki McCready  
Jennifer McHugh  
Suzanne Mengert  
Margaret Misch

Farah Marie Mokhtareizadeh  
Rosemary Molinary  
Drs. Lawrence & Claire Morse  
Mary Montgomery  
Elijah Mungo  
Marty Nathan  
Clarence & Helen Parker  
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Robert & Lucy Scott Pryor  
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Peter J. Santogade  
Kathleen Shapley-Quinn  
Beth Sheffield  
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James Squire  
Teresa Staley  
Darryl Stith & Samye Miller  
Pablo Stone  
John & Carol Stoneburner  
Steve Sumerford  
Willie Lee Taylor  
University Presbyterian Church  
Leslie Urban  
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Mary Wakeman  
Barbara Walker  
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Terrence & Mary Wessling  
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Maryanna Williams  
Meena S. Wilson  
Peter Wohlwend  
N.C. A&T Women's Studies Department  
John Young  
Emily Zeanah

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Adam Zucker	NC A&T State University Television Studio
Applebee's (Battleground Ave.)	New Garden Friends Meeting
Bennett College for Women	News & Record
Bruegger's Bagels (Friendly)	Outback Steakhouse (Four Seasons)
Carolinanet.com	Panera Bread
Carolina Peacemaker	Qdoba's Mexican Grille
Chick-fil-a	Sound Lab Recording Studio
Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro	Rhinoceros Times
Davenport, Marvin, Joyce and Co., L.L.P.	Sam's Club
Harris Teeter	Target
Golden Corral (Lawndale Ave.)	Televisual Productions
The Green Bean	Tuscan Cuisine
Greensboro Police Department	UNCG's American Democracy Project
Kimber Guard and Patrol	Yes! Weekly
Maxie B's (Battleground Ave.)	
Mayflower Restaurant	

## **Advisors and report consultants**

Many individuals have contributed their experience and wisdom to enhancing our public hearings, community dialogue and final report. In particular, we appreciate the sustained guidance offered by our principal advisor, Lisa Magarrell of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), who has been consulting with the truth and reconciliation process in Greensboro since its inception. We also thank Lisa and the ICTJ for facilitating contacts with many of the following advisors, both in and outside of the United States. We also thank Irving Joyner for serving as a primary legal advisor as we have struggled to understand the legal complexities surrounding the events of Nov. 3, 1979.



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Catherine Admay, Professor, of Law and Public Policy, Duke University  
David Billings, Trainer, The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond  
Arthur Blundell, Chair, Panel of Experts to Liberia, United Nations  
Alex Boraine, former President, ICTJ, and former deputy chair, South Africa TRC  
Carolyn Blum, Lecturer-in-Law, Columbia University  
Millicent Brown, Associate Professor of History, North Carolina A&T State University  
William Chafe, Professor of History, Duke University  
Roger Conner, Andrus Family Fund  
David Cunningham, Associate Professor of Sociology, Brandeis University  
Carlos Iván Degregori, Visiting Professor of Sociology, Princeton University, former Commissioner, Peruvian TRC  
E. Franklin Dukes, Director, Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia  
John Esmerado, Assistant Prosecutor, Union County, State of New Jersey  
Rev. Bongani Finca, former Commissioner, South African TRC  
Madeline Fullard, former Researcher, South African TRC  
Eduardo Gonzalez, Senior Associate, ICTJ, and former member of the staff of the Peruvian TRC  
Suzana Grego, Communications Director, ICTJ  
Priscilla Hayner, Director, International Policymakers Unit, ICTJ  
Deena Hurwitz, Director, Human Rights Program, University of Virginia School of Law  
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Spoma Jovanovic, Assistant Professor of Communication, UNC Greensboro  
Irv Joyner, Professor of Law, North Carolina Central University  
Steve Kelban, Andrus Family Fund  
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Robert Korstad, Associate Professor of History and Public Policy, Duke University  
Neil Lerner, Associate Professor of Music, Davidson College  
Sofia Macher, former Commissioner, Peruvian TRC  
Lisa Magarrell, Senior Associate, ICTJ  
Graeme Simpson, Country Program Director, ICTJ  
Judge Stephen Swanson, Fourth District Court, State of Minnesota  
Paul van Zyl, Program Director, ICTJ  
Monica Walker, Trainer, The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

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## Volunteers and Other Contributors

Without the help of the following people, the GTRC could not have completed its work. These individuals contributed to this process in a variety of ways including: serving as Commissioners; taking, transcribing and summarizing statements; encouraging people to give statements; volunteering at public events; collecting newspaper articles or other research material; performing at and/or helping plan benefit concerts; conducting surveys about our public events; filming and editing our public events and our public access television show; and many other responsibilities vital to this work.

Amy Ambachtsheer  
Enjonae Anderson  
Lila Anton  
Winston Argyle  
Vance Arnold  
Brianna Atkins  
Terry Austin  
Kathleen Baireuther  
Jen Baker  
Mike Barber  
Christian Barbie  
Michael Battle  
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Sheldon Beatty  
Susie Bell  
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Patricia Black  
Eliza Blake  
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Michael Blunck  
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Sarah Brassard  
Kyle Brebner  
Alexander Breznay  
Jessica Bridges-Green  
Lya Wesley Britt  
Megan Brooks

Melinda Brooks  
Cynthia Brown  
Warren Buford  
Andrew Calhoun  
Vickie Calise  
Larry Canady  
April Cannon  
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Kendrick Carter  
Keith Carter  
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Orleana Clark  
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Andy Coon  
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Jennifer Dail  
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Gary Todd  
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Paula Thomas  
Judith Thompson  
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Shona Trumbo  
Jamie Uss  
Stephanie Vance

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Allison Van Hee  
Alexic Vaughn  
Kish Vinayagamoorthy  
Alex Vizzier  
Janice Wakefield  
Barbara Walker  
James Warren  
Todd Warren  
Valerie Warren  
Stefanie Watson  
Fred Wesley  
Gertie Wesley

Cory Weschler  
Mary Wessling  
Wally West  
Rodney Westmoreland  
Eric Whitaker  
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Jacinta White  
Ed Whitfield  
Sheila Whitley  
Dr. Claudette Williams  
Neubia Williams  
Joan Williams

Cameron Wilkin  
Dixon Williams  
Julie Williams  
Maryanna Williams  
Neubia Williams  
Dr. Meena Wilson  
Courtney Wingate  
Jesse Young  
John Young  
Emily Zeanah

## **Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project**

The Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project (GTCRP) launched the democratic process that created this Commission. Numerous individuals worked through the Project at various points in the organization's history, which dates back to 2001. (Names provided by the GTCRP).

### ***Selection Panel***

The following individuals were appointed to the Selection Panel, which worked independently of the Project and its initiators to whittle 67 community nominations to our panel of seven Commissioners.

#### **Representative**

Dara Edelman  
Linda Brown  
Dorothy Brown  
Edward Whitfield  
Judge Lawrence McSwain  
George Hines  
Curtis Douglas  
Badi Ali  
Sylvia Berkelhammer  
Viola Fuller  
Steve Simpson  
Rev. Eric Griffin  
Donny Brown  
Bishop Woodrow Dawkins

#### **Appointing Group/Individual**

Local college and university student body presidents  
Local college and university chancellors & presidents  
Greensboro Neighborhood Congress  
GTCRP  
Mayor of Greensboro  
Guilford County Democratic Party  
Guilford County Republican Party  
Muslim Community  
Jewish Community  
NAACP  
NCCJ  
Pulpit Forum  
Triad Central Labor Council  
Community Representative



---

## Local Task Force

The following individuals served at some point on the GTCRP's Local Task Force, which first gathered in the spring of 2002.

Carolyn Allen	Casey Hazelman	John Morrison
Melvin Alston	Rev. Greg Headen	Dr. Lawrence Morse
Margaret Arbuckle	Dick Hoard	Liz Nemitz
Vance Arnold	Robert Holcombe	Marsha Paludan
Marilyn Baird	Catherine Holcombe	John Parker
Dr. Claude Barnes	Daisy Holland	Suzanne Plihcik
Dr. Ernest Bradford	Rev. Z.N. Holler	Lewis Pitts
Lewis A. Brandon, III	Rev. Nelson Johnson	Kit Ravenel
Rev. Cardes Brown	Joyce Johnson	Rev. Marvin Richmond
Donny Brown	Yvonne Johnson	Dr. Richard Rosen
Claudette Burroughs-White	Randy Johnston	Laura Seel
Willena Cannon	Spoma Jovanovic	Matthew Shelton
Vivian Clarke	Jim Keith	Portia Shipman
Nettie Coad	Rev. Frank Kelleher	Stephen Simpson
Carolyn Coleman	Rev. Vernon King	Carolyn Stancil
Rev. Mary Crawford	Kay Lovelace	Carol Steger
Eileen Curry	Bishop Alfred "Chip" Marble	Janice Sullivan
Dr. Robert Davis	Chellie Mason	Steve Sumerford
Vernie Davis	Rev. Kenneth Massey	Minister Phillip Tate
Libby Detter	Keniyona Matthews	Jeff Thigpen
Rev. Frank Dew	Rev. Heather McCain	Dr. Signe Waller
Rev. Jim Dollar	Angus McGregor	Ed Whitfield
Tom Droppers	Rev. Beth McKee-Huger	Peter Wohlwend
Rev. Chris East	Dr. Charmaine McKissick-Melton	Rev. William Wright
Rev. Lou East	Sue Mengert	John Young
John Farmer	Rev. Lucretia Middleton	Emily Zeanah
Rev. Eric Griffin	Alexis Mitchell	
Rabbi Fred Guttman	Dr. Roy Moore	

## National Advisory Committee

The following individuals served on the GTCRP's National Advisory Committee, which first gathered in March 2002.

Donald and Carolyn Allen	Beni Ivey	Rev. Tyrone Pitts
Jose Alvarez	Rev. Nelson Johnson	Scott Pryor
Dr. Sally Bermanzohn	Joyce Johnson	Kerry Raquel Little
Sandy Bermanzohn	Steve Kelban	Harris Raynor
Dr. Anne Braden	Sabena Leake	Dr. Gloria Scott
Lewis A. Brandon, III	Lucy Lewis	Stephen Simpson
Alex Charns	Lisa Magarrell	Dr. Peter Storey
Vaughn Crandall	Dr. Peggy Maisel	Dr. William Strickland
Constance Curry	Emily Mann	Rev. Doug Tanner
Dr. Robert Davis	Rabbi Robert Marx	Ruth Trujillo
Rev. James Fenhagen	Dr. Cesar McDowell	Dr. Signe Waller
Joseph Frierson	Andrew McThenia	Honorable Melvin Watt
Dr. Vincent Harding	Ched Myers	Dr. Eve Weibaum
Priscilla Hayner	Cynthia Nance	Kent Wong
Rev. Z.N. Holler	Dr. Marty Nathan	
Charlene Holler	Suzanne Pharr	















# Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report



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